

Is Magic Wrong?

AN HISTORICAL AND RELIGIOUS EXPLORATION



BROTHER A.D.A.

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QUICK REFERENCE – BULLET POINTS

- * Is Magic Wrong? Is it evil?
- * Society has said “yes” for over 4,000 years.
- * Hammurabi legislated against harmful magic.
- * The Romans legislated against knowledge of magic.
- * The Jews sought to mitigate belief in magic.
- * Magic was defined as poisoning and demons.
- * The word “demon” originally meant any spirit.
- * The word later came to mean “evil spirit.”
- * The ancient magical texts used the first meaning.
- * People projected the later meaning onto the texts.
- * Christianity inherited Jewish and Pagan laws.
- * Christianity did not question what it inherited.
- * Early medieval Christianity ignored magic as ineffective.
- * Late medieval Christianity paid attention to magic.
- * The renaissance brought a positive appraisal of magic. That appraisal was cut short by the witchcraze and the Protestant Revolt.
- * Magic is applied theology.
- * Prayer is a form of magic called theurgy.
- * Medals, scapulars, etc. are magic operations.
- * The Church insists on a narrow definition of magic.
- * The Church thus contradicts herself by promoting magical acts while condemning magic in principle.
- * Magic in itself is not wrong, and you can do it too.

INTRODUCTION

“Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live.” – Exodus 22:18
(KJV)

We live in a time of change. Science changes our worldview, technology changes our lifestyle, and religion continues to mold our thinking.

Religion in general – and Judeo-Christian religion in particular – has played an important part in shaping the way we view our world, and part of that shaping affects how we view the magic arts.

For generations, it's been believed that magic is “wrong” or “evil,” yet it thrives at the hands of church-going Christians: I've met Holiness congregations who call it “spiritual work” and folk practitioners who call what they do “curing” or “the way of blessing.” We find a clear double-standard in such people that it's okay to practice magic so long as they don't call it “magic,” and one can only ask: “Is magic such a bad thing in the first place?”

My answer is two-fold: first, that magic is neutral as opposed to “good” or “evil;” and second, that the way Christians view magic is the result of a historical process stretching back long before the advent of Christianity. The Christian view of magic is merely one ripple in a stream that has always been fearful and hostile.

What is this stream? How can we navigate it? Do we even need to? I invite you to consider all these

questions and more, as I take you on a trip through the distant past. I'll be your tour guide and map out this stream which flows from remote antiquity to the present day.

I. HISTORY OF THE WORLD, PART I

"All pre-modern European societies believed in magick [*sic*]. As far as we can tell, all passed laws prohibiting magickal [*sic*] crimes. Pagan Roman law and the earliest Germanic and Celtic law codes all contain edicts that punish people who cast baneful spells. This is only common sense: a society that believes in the power of magick [*sic*] will punish people who abuse that power."

– Jenny Gibbons, *Recent Developments in the Study of the Great European Witch Hunt*

Long before Christians or even Jews set to condemn the magic art, the Pagan nations had already made laws against it.

We start our tour around 2,000 B.C., when the Code of Hammurabi was enacted into law. The very first law in the code is a punishment against magical crimes:

"If a man charge a man with sorcery, and cannot prove it, he who is charged with sorcery shall go to the river, into the river he shall throw himself and if the river overcome him, his accuser shall take to himself his house (estate). If the river show that man to be innocent and he come forth unharmed, he who

charged him with sorcery shall be put to death.
He who threw himself into the river shall take
to himself the house of his accuser."

Though Hammurabi's kingdom is long gone, contemporary Bible scholars agree that parts of his code survive in the Law of the ancient Hebrews (the *Torah*, or first five books of the Bible), where the prohibitions against magic are strengthened. We will revisit this shortly.

In the ancient Mediterranean, we find the Romans passing similar laws, starting with the *Laws of the Twelve Tables* which place a death penalty on enchanters:

"Whoever enchants by singing an evil incantation ... If anyone sings or composes an incantation that can cause dishonor or disgrace to another ... he shall suffer a capital penalty."

By 82 B.C., we find the Roman dictator Lucius Cornelius Sulla passing the *Cornelian Laws against Assassins and Sorcerors*, where he condemns all magic-users to death by wild beasts, burning, or crucifixion. Unlike earlier laws, Sulla makes no distinction between "good" and "bad" magic. The law simply says: "... for not only is the practice of this art prohibited, but also the knowledge of the same."

Amongst the Romans these prohibitions strengthened and spread, even more so as the Roman Empire came to master most of the entire known world. The historian Suetonius tells us that when Augustus

became the High Priest of Rome (*Pontifex Maximus*), he ordered over two thousand books on magic and prophecy burned. He is said to have retained the *Sibylline Oracles* (legendary books that link to Rome's founding), and even picking and choosing amongst those.

This brings us to the threshold of the Christian era, and gives us an opportunity to review what we've found so far. Why is it that while the earlier laws were simply against the abuse of magic, the later laws came to prohibit all use of magic in any form whatsoever?

As we continue exploring this stream, the answer to that lies in one of its tributaries. We shall explore that tributary in the next chapter.

II. TRAFFICKING WITH DEMONS

As we branch out and explore a tributary into this stream, we also need to backtrack and discuss what kind of magic practices existed during the pre-Christian era. What was it that filled kings and emperors with so much dread for the magic arts?

A little research will find that the answer had to do with fear and superstition, aided in no small part by the fact ancient magic often involved dealing with demons.

What is that, you say? Demons? No way, this part of the tour isn't what you signed up for!

Well hold on there, because the word "demon" didn't always have the meaning it has today. In fact, the word's meaning has changed - a lot - from its inception to the present day.

The origin of modern demonology comes from the ancient Near East, where the word for "demon" was *sedu*, meaning a spirit good or bad. The 2008 Jewish Encyclopedia has this to say on the subject:

"Moreover, in none of the languages of the ancient Near East, including Hebrew, is there any one general term equivalent to English 'demon.' In general, the notion of a demon in the ancient Near East was of a being less powerful than a god and less endowed with individuality."

As to the word “demon” itself, it originally comes from the ancient Greek *daimon*, referring to a spiritual being. If we split hairs further, we come to *daimon* referring to a person’s “guardian spirit” or “spirit guide,” while the word *daimonion* refers to a class of spiritual beings of lower rank than the *theoi*, or gods.

In the classical sense, *daimonion* wasn’t a blanket terms for evil spirits, but instead we could find references to good *daimonia* and evil *daimonia*. They were simply spirits, with notions of “good” and “evil” belonging to their actions but not to their essence.

We see this meaning obtaining as late as the third century B.C. when the Hebrew Bible was translated into Greek. This most affects us in Psalm 96:5:

For all the gods of the peoples are idols;
but the LORD made the heavens.

(Revised Standard Version)

Where we read the word “idols,” the original Hebrew text gives *elilim*, which has three meanings: idols, vain things, or worthless works. So we can see the Hebrew text says is deriding the Pagan gods as being worthless and unworthy of mankind’s attentions.

When the Bible was translated into Greek in the *Septuagint* version (also called the *LXX*), the word *elilim* was mistranslated as *daimonia*, which changes the text like this:

For all the gods of the peoples are **spirits**;
but the LORD made the heavens.

With one little word, everything was switched around. As the meaning of *daimonion* progressed to mean a specifically evil spirit, this would have huge ramifications in centuries to come.

So, how did this value-neutral word for spirit come to denote “evil?” The Wikipedia article on “demon” says that it’s a result of Judeo-Christian views, though I find this problematic for two reasons: Jews were a minority of the Mediterranean’s population and therefore in no position to influence and entire language and culture, and the change in meaning seems to have been completed before Christianity appeared on the scene.

Actually, I don’t know if anybody has a solid answer for this change of meaning, though my guess would be the meaning of the word “demon” was influenced by the purposes for which they were called.

If we look at the magical charms and formulae that existed between the 4th century B.C.E. and the 2nd century C.E., we come across something called the *Greek Magical Papyri*. These papyri mixed Pagan, Jewish, and (later) Christian elements, and here we find formulae that called upon demons to force women to show themselves in the nude, to bring ruin upon one’s enemies, and various other works often considered “evil.” Sooner or later, it was probably inevitable that an entire class of spirits evoked for

“evil” deeds would come to be considered evil by association.

III. HISTORY OF THE WORLD, PART II

As Pagans and Jews enacted laws against magic, and the class of spiritual beings known as *daimonia* came to be seen as evil, it was roughly that point in history when Christianity appeared on the scene.

Whether or not Jesus of Nazareth was God incarnate, the fact remains that no religion starts in a vacuum, and Christianity is no exception. The early Christians were products of their society – many of the first converts were slaves and low-born members of their society – and they more or less uncritically accepted society’s laws.

In the Christian documents of the first century C.E., we find a repetition of the condemnations of magic handed down from the Pagans and the Jews. While the original Greek of the New Testament tends to make a careful distinction between “wise man” (*magos*) and “witch/ poisoner” (*pharmakos*), and only once refers to a book burning of “curiosities” (*perierga*, Acts 19:19), the other writings of the first century don’t make that distinction.

In the more influential writings such as the *Didache* (the first catechism) and the *Epistle of Barnabas*, both the “wise man” and the “witch/ poisoner” are condemned side-by-side, by name. We see no special enlightenment and no theological introspection on this subject within the early Christian community,

only a repetition of what was passed on to them from their Jewish and Pagan ancestors.

The laws against magic continued unchanged well into the Christian era, though from the mid 600's we begin to see a movement away from belief in witches. For example, the Lombard Law of 643 tells us:

"Let nobody presume to kill a foreign serving maid or female servant as a witch, for it is not possible, nor ought to be believed by Christian minds."

In the tenth century, the *Canon Episcopi* (which became part of medieval Church law) bluntly says that anyone who believes in magic is an infidel (non-Christian):

"Whoever therefore believes that anything can be made, or that any creature can be changed to better or worse, or transformed into another species or likeness, except by God Himself who made everything and through whom all things were made, is beyond a doubt an infidel."

It was in the thirteenth century that we see a resurgence in beliefs in magic, and the writings of St. Thomas Aquinas were influential. In his *Summa Contra Gentiles*, Aquinas was heavily influenced by Augustine who decried all magic as idolatry and fellowship with demons.

Where Aquinas departs from Augustine in saying that magic is wrought by spiritual intelligences, that it

logically follows that these intelligences are not good because they assist in sinful acts, yet these intelligences are not necessarily evil (because all God's creation is good), though they may have an evil affect about them.

In his *Summa Theologiae*, Aquinas also displays a level head in points out whether an act should be considered magical, namely by determining whether the action can produce that bodily effect of its own accord (like eating a root to cause sleep, for example), or if the act is a "compact by tokens entered into with the demons."

In the centuries after Aquinas we encounter a large-scale revival of belief in magic which would eventually lead to the witch-trials of the Early Modern period. Yet that is another chapter.

IV. WHAT DID MAGIC LOOK LIKE?

As we continue exploring this stream, we can't help but notice a tributary in the form of what magic historically looked like. What kinds of practices were the Pagans, Jews, and Christians looking to outlaw in the first place?

I think that once we have a grasp for what ancient and medieval authorities recognized as "magic," it will be easier to understand why they railed against it the way they did.

So how will we do this? In a brief book as this, I think the best way is to discuss a few surviving magical texts from each period.

We can begin with the Greek Magical Papyri, which give a good picture of what magical practices looked like in the ancient Mediterranean. These papyri survive in fragments of manuscripts written between 400 B.C.E. and 200 C.E., and contain a mixture of Pagan, Jewish, and Christian elements. A collection of them can be found online at:

<http://hermetic.com/pgm/>

On papyrus number III.1-59, we find a spell for restraining charioteers (i.e. "fixing" the outcome of sporting events). It begins by drowning a cat while invoking the goddess Bast, and then says:

"Take the cat, and make [three] lamellae, one for its anus, one for ..., and one for its throat; and write the

formula [concerning the] deed on a clean sheet of papyrus, with cinnabar [ink], and [then the names of] the chariots and charioteers, and the chariot boards and the racehorses. Wind this around the body of the cat and bury it."

We're off to a great start, aren't we? In papyrus IV.1716-1870 we come across a spell called the "Sword of Dardanos," intended to force a woman to the operator's will. While it doesn't involve killing cats, it does involve forcing a person to do things (presumably sexual) that they may not do without magical coercion.

In papyrus VII.429-58 we come across a spell that describes itself thus:

"A restraining [rite] for anything, works even on chariots. It also causes enmity and sickness, cuts down, destroys, and overturns, for [whatever] you wish. The spell [in it], when said, conjures daimons [out] and makes them enter [objects or people]."

The list goes on and on, and I think these examples give us a glimpse into why magic was outlawed by Pagans and Jews alike: people did some whacked-out stuff with it. By the time Christianity appeared on the scene, the new leadership saw no need to open a new investigation into a matter that had long been considered settled.

Of course, this only settles one side of the matter. Coexisting with these types of magical spells we have

another kind of magic called “theurgy,” or “God-working.” This was a magic very unlike what we see in the Papyri, and is defined by Wikipedia as:

“. . . the practice of rituals, sometimes seen as magical in nature, performed with the intention of invoking the action or evoking the presence of one or more gods, especially with the goal of uniting with the divine, achieving henosis, and perfecting oneself.”

This definition is correct, and the whole project of theurgy can be considered a ritual path to spiritual development. This is a phenomenon we find in all religions, including Christianity with its doctrines of salvation, its encouragement of the devotional life, and its sacramental system.

We even find traces of this in branches of Protestantism which reject the sacramental system, because when they reject the Eucharist, the substitute the Altar Call. When they reject Baptismal regeneration, some groups substitute Speaking in Tongues while others substitute the Sinner’s Prayer. When they reject the rosary and holy water, some substitute other forms of regular devotion others claim to chase away demons with oil.

No religion can last very long without some form of spirituality, and Christianity is no exception.

We move on from the ancient world and into the medieval period. The magic we see here doesn’t really differ from the ancient world in terms of

intentions – human beings seek money and sex in all times and places – yet the practices become more explicitly demonic and feature a debasement of theurgy. It becomes a debasement of theurgy that calls upon God to command demons, while the demons themselves are commanded to steal up hidden treasure or force women to show themselves in the nude.

An example of this kind of magic can be found in the fifteenth century grimoire now known only as *Codex Latinus Monacensis 849*. In this book, the names of Jesus and the Holy Trinity are used to command the demons (by now firmly presumed to be evil spirits) to give the operator whatever he desires. The book contains conjurations such as:

“I conjure all you demons odious and malignant, jealous and discordant:

- By the unity of the Holy Ghost the Advocate, dwelling in the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit,
 - And by the eternity of all created things,
 - And by all the holy men and women of God,
 - And by these holy names, by which power the Lord of Olympus vouchsafed to form heaven and earth, to wit Aa, Sabaoth, Helyn, and Abacel,
 - And by all the kings and lords of hell,
 - And by these names of demons, to with Apolyn, Gebel, Astaroth, Tereol, Falmar, and Tyroces . . .”
- (“To sow Discord,” *my translation*)

Toward the Renaissance, we come across magical cookbooks such as the *Grimoire of Pope Honorius*, which mixes the invocation of demons into the ceremonies of the Catholic Mass, and the *True Book of the Jesuits (Verus Jesuitarum Libellus)* which claims to evoke angels and yet treats them like demons.

So when one asks why magic was condemned in times past, one must remember the type of magic the authorities were condemning. The magic books most commonly found were those which encourage contact with evil spirits, which encourage theft (one claims a spirit can give you gold from the palace treasury!), and which encourage the violation of another's free will (in the case of love magic, this can be tantamount to rape). We're not necessarily looking at magic for its own sake, but we are looking at magic combined with activities that would be illegal even if magical means weren't part of the picture.

V. HISTORY OF THE WORLD, PART III

Thus far, we've traveled from the mists of antiquity to the Middle Ages. We now enter the intellectual milieu of the Renaissance and the emergence of a different attitude toward magic as well as Church authority.

There are two events that stand out from the Renaissance, which irrevocably changed the western world: the invention of the Printing Press and the Protestant Revolt.

With the invention of the printing press, books became cheaper to produce. This not only meant the literacy rate in Europe began to increase, it also meant the learned could have easier access to texts previously stuffed away in monasteries and university libraries.

Not only that, we also have Greek-speaking refugees from the now-destroyed Byzantine Empire. When these refugees came to Europe, they rekindled interest in the classics of Greek literature. It was this combination of rekindled interest (refugees) and easier access to texts (the printing press) that sparked the Renaissance, and this rekindled interest also applied to texts on magic.

This is the situation where we find Pico De Mirandola, author of the Renaissance manifesto *Oration on the Dignity of Man*.

In his *Oration*, Pico says that the ancients understood two different and mutually incompatible types of magic, the first called “*mageia*” and the second “*goëteia*.” He called the former “lofty and noble” and the latter “base and profane.”

The same year, Pico also published his *900 Theses*, where he writes plainly: “Nothing certifies us of the divinity of Christ more than magic and Kabbalah.”

Not only private writers, but we also see activity from the pens of clerics. In the same year as the *Oration*, we also see the first of the great Witch-Hunting manuals, the *Malleus Maleficarum*. The *Malleus* contains a lot of unsavory material, yet it too concludes that there is a sort of lawful magic within the eyes of the Church. In Part II of the text, the authors speak of “lawful enchanters,” saying:

“And even if he uses adjurations, through the virtue of the Divine Name, and by the virtue of the works of Christ, . . . **such benedictions and charms and exorcisms shall be called lawful, and they who practice them are exorcists or lawful enchanters.**”

We’ll come back to this passage from the *Malleus* in a later chapter, where we discuss the Church’s inconsistent attitude concerning magical practice. In the meantime, it’s significant to recognize that the Renaissance brought with it a re-appraisal of magic, and had it not been interrupted by the Protestant Revolution and the politics of dealing therewith, that re-appraisal may have ended up more positive.

What is important is that the floodgates were now open. Later writers such as Raymond Lully, Paracelsus, Agrippa, and a host of others would pick up on Pico's theme of two different arts – "magic" and "sorcery" – and some would advance their own conception of how such an art would be practiced.

Yes, the "black art" theme of the old grimoires was still around, and new grimoires were still being written such as the *Lemegeton* in the seventeenth century and the *Red Dragon* in the nineteenth. If we can count on anything, we can count on human nature remaining the same throughout history.

Yet in the centuries since Pico, we also see a balancing trend attempting to reconnect magic to the domain of theurgy. We can see this in John Dee's "Enochian" system, perhaps the only indigenously Protestant high magic system in existence (in its original form it was very Protestant), and the distinction between magician and sorcerer is repeated again in Eliphas Levi's *Dogma and Ritual of High Magic*.

In the twentieth century, magical texts and orders attempting to teach a "balanced" or a "right-hand path" form of magic have largely abandoned their predecessors' Christian roots, while remaining indebted to the work of Pico and other Renaissance Christians who brought the subject out of obscurity and set it before the eyes of future generations.

VI. WHERE ARE WE NOW?

When we began this journey, we set out on a stream beginning some 4,000 years in the past, exploring some of that stream's forks and branches along the way. Now we can begin to see where that stream empties out into the vast ocean of the present, making us realize our journey's almost over.

So what does this leave us to consider? I think it's time to consider a few things.

1. What magic has been considered.
2. What magic really is.
3. The Church's self-contradictory stance on it.
4. Whether we can practice it.

We've spent the past many chapters reading about what magic has been considered throughout history: poisoning people, traffic with spirits, use of occult means to cause harm or steal from one's neighbor. This conception has led to laws being passed against magic of every kind by Pagans and Jews, and these laws and conceptions were later inherited by Christians who accepted them without much real reflection. The result of this inheritance – particularly the witch trials in Germany, Salem, and other Protestant lands – is too tragic to describe with justice in such a small volume as this one.

(For more information on the witch trials, the reader is referred to Gibbons' *Recent Developments in the Study of the Great European Witch Hunt*, quoted in an

earlier chapter, and Edward Peters' *The Magician, the Witch, and the Law*, 1982, University of Pennsylvania Press.)

This brings us to what magic actually *is*. Many definitions have been proposed for this, and my personal definition is "applied theology."

Why do I say this? I say this because seminary textbooks commonly define theology as "faith seeking understanding," or more directly, the attempt to systematize and understand the contents of what one believes. Now when a person works magic, he or she is attempting to apply belief (God-names, angels, spirits, powers of rocks, herbs, etc.) toward making things happen. This is where we see the application of the magician's theology.

This "applied theology" extends to any use of belief (religious or superstitious) with the intention of manifesting a result. When we pray for the winning lottery numbers, for example, we are exercising our belief in God and seeking the result of getting rich. This qualifies as *theurgic* magic, because it relies on God.

In like manner, if we ask for St. Raphael the Archangel to heal our sick mother who's in the hospital, we're practicing a form of theurgy called *Angelic* magic. It's of no small importance that such a prayer is found in Catholic prayer books.

Many other such examples of religious magic can be found in prayer books and devotionals, and even though we've been conditioned to think of these as "prayer" and not as "magic," the mechanics are still the same – both apply the operator's belief system and both call on supernatural means to accomplish a desired result – and the contender would be hard-pressed to point out how one method is less magical than the other. At least in any objective sense, that is.

This, in turn, brings us to the Church's self-contradictory stance on the subject of magic. This is where I'll focus on Catholicism, since the Protestant churches never bothered with the question save to say that magic is evil, that magic is a superstition, and that everybody who practices it is going to hell (according to the old-school Protestants, this includes those benighted Catholics!).

Traditionally, in Catholic theology, magic is considered a sin against the First Commandment: "Thou shalt have no other Gods before me." The problem is that after this point, Catholicism lacks a coherent theology concerning the magic arts, or even a consistent definition of the word "magic" itself.

For example, the 1911 *Catholic Encyclopedia* (the edition on New Advent's website) claims that Catholic theology defines magic as producing supernatural effects with the aid of powers other than the divine (i.e. anything other than God's help). For all my research, I've yet to uncover this definition in any manual of moral or dogmatic theology.

The most one will find in these textbooks is that magic is considered a species of idolatry and a “worship of false gods,” and Slater’s *A Manual of Moral Theology* simply classifies magic as a “Vain Observance” and defines it as “wonderworking with the help of the devil.” (p. 144)

We then have the 1965 edition of the *Maryknoll Catholic Dictionary* which divides magic into “white and black magic” and outright says “white magic is perfectly lawful.” The current *Catechism of the Catholic Church* does not attempt to define magic, but claims that by it “one attempts to tame occult powers, so as to . . . have a supernatural power over others . . .” and condemns it as a sin against religion (n. 2117).

Whence the contradiction? When my mother worked as a nurse in the VA system, she taught me an abbreviation that’s common there: CYA, or “Cover Your A**.” I suspect that’s exactly what the Church is doing.

I suspect this because within Catholicism, there are loads of methods and devotions designed precisely for producing a supernatural effect.

Lose your car keys? Pray to Saint Anthony.

Need to sell your house? Bury a statue of St. Joseph.

Looking for a husband? Pray to St. Anne.

Spirits bothering you? Get a St. Benedict medal.

Protect your car? Get a St. Christopher medal.

Want something really badly? There's a 54-day Rosary novena to Our Lady of Pompeii, which is guaranteed to make it happen!

Problems with another person? Have your guardian angel talk to their guardian angel about it. (Bonus: this was a personal practice of Pope John XXIII.)

And now I defy you, gentle reader, to show me exactly how these practices are not inherently magical.

And there's the crux of the matter. By claiming magic is "bad" and "idolatry" and necessarily involves "evil spirits," the Church is either parroting what she inherited from the Jews and Pagans, or she's protecting her people from what she believes to be charlatans (and fraudsters certainly do abound!), or she's edging out the competition. I think all three of these factors are involved, and I want to zoom in on that last one especially.

I mean, what the Church promotes is different in practice and appearance from what other magicians promote, but at the end of the day, the difference in substance is no different from saying "We're Coke and they're Pepsi." For the same reasons Coke and Pepsi make the exact "we're different" kind of claims.

Last but not least, this brings us to the end of the stream and the end of our journey: can we practice magic?

I say, unequivocally, the answer is “Yes, we can!”

I say this after urging you to ask yourself the following questions:

1. Do I seek to take glory away from God?
2. Do I seek to call on the aid of evil spirits?
3. Do I seek a purpose that would be criminal if I tried it the “natural way,” or to violate another’s free will?

If you can honestly say “No” to all three questions, then your system of magic is perfectly acceptable, and you can rest assured you’re not committing a sin.

Hence if a person were to ask me whether magic is wrong or evil, I would look them in the eye and say “Not on your life!”

VII. CHRISTIAN MAGICAL PRACTICE

Now that we've established that magic is not inherently "evil," let's talk about how one sets foot on the path to becoming a Christian magician. Up until the late 20th century, the vast majority of practicing magicians were devout Christians. This may even still be true today, though we've no way of knowing for sure.

There are books one could read to get started, like my *The Magic of Catholicism*, and the only overtly Christian magical Order of which I'm aware is the *Order of the Astral Star* which can be found on the internet. There are also Gnostic and Theosophical churches which espouse their brand of magical Christianity, and several "family tradition" practitioners who practice a form of (usually ethnic) folk magic passed on from their ancestors.

For the individual getting started, the first step is two-fold: 1) living by a high moral standard, and 2) prayer and meditation. These give balance and purpose to the outer and inner life, respectively.

It's long been said that how we live is indicative of how we believe, and living by a high moral standard is indicative of believing in a high spiritual goal. Yet we all have some flaw in our character, some vice that we seek to overcome but maybe feel we're not strong enough. What can we do?

Fortunately, the *Spiritual Exercises* of St. Ignatius gives us an answer:

1. Start by choosing a particular sin or bad habit you wish to eliminate.
2. Every time you do it during the day, make a mark on a piece of paper.
3. At the end of the day, count how many times you did it.
4. This focuses your attention on it. Keep tabulating the number of times each day, and ideally the sin or habit should drop with time.
5. Not all things can be vanquished this way, but they can be minimized.

As we look over this method, point 5 is something we should expand. When we talk about sin and morality, it gets easy to take things too far and advocate for repression. This almost always happens in religious discourse, especially when we talk about sexual morality. So let me say this once: REPRESSION IS NOT MORALITY. REPRESSION IS NOT GOOD. REPRESSION IS UNNATURAL.

A strong moral character is one that lives in accordance with nature as God created it, in accordance with God and with his neighbor. A repressed character is a sign of personal weakness and becomes a ticking time bomb waiting to go off.

While the answer is different for all of us, we must find the balance between morality and repression, and if psychiatric or spiritual help is needed for this to happen (in some cases it is), then by all means get help.

As the moral life reflects the spiritual life, so too does the spiritual life reflect the moral life. The principle here is that the outer (moral) is a reflection of the inner (spiritual).

The spiritual life is first and foremost a life of prayer and meditation, a life of connecting with God and of manifesting His will through your life. When we consider that God's grace is His uncreated energy (in eastern Christianity this is said explicitly), we come even more to understand how this ties in with the Christian magical life.

When I first take on a student, the first exercise I give him or her is a simple meditation. This "Meditation on the Divine Presence" is practiced once a day for three weeks, and serves as an act of spiritual communion to help connect oneself with the power and love of the Holy Trinity.

1. Sit comfortably, not crossing your arms or legs.
2. Establish the rhythmic breathing.
3. Once you are relaxed, imagine all negativity dissipating from you, helping you relax even further.

4. Now imagine God the Father as a large, brilliant white flame filling and enveloping you. Focus on this image over the next three breaths, while saying mentally:

1st breath: "God the Father of heaven * fills me with His power and with His love."

2nd breath: "The Creator of heaven and earth * Who shall judge both on the Last Day."

3rd breath: "Fills me * with His power and with His love."

5. Afterwards, imagine God the Son in the same manner, as a large, brilliant, golden flame. Hold this image for the next three breaths, while saying mentally:

1st breath: "Jesus Christ, Redeemer of the world * fills me with His power and with His love."

2nd breath: "Who died for love of us, * and Whose blood made us free."

3rd breath: "Fills me * with His power and with His love."

6. Thirdly, imagine God the Holy Ghost as a large, brilliant, rose-gold flame. Hold this image for the next three breaths, while saying mentally:

1st breath: "God, the Holy Ghost, the Paraclete * fills me with His power and with His love."

2nd breath: "Who descended on the Apostles * and gives power to the Church."

3rd breath: "Fills me * with His power and with His love."

7. Afterwards, concentrate on these three flames as they course through you, and feel them filling your entire being.
8. Continue the rhythmic breathing while the image fades slowly from your consciousness. Afterwards, seal yourself with the Sign of the Cross.

This meditation may be done in addition to one's regular daily spiritual exercises, and builds the strong spiritual connection necessary for the next stages in magical practice. After the first 21 days, the student is free to continue using this exercise each day or every other day, and continued use is recommended.

Further steps of magical practice involve training the faculties of concentration, visualization, the study of theology and spirituality, and how to apply them to one's personal life.

VIII. THE END

For now, gentle reader, this is where our journey together ends. We now know that magic in and of itself is not wrong, we've discussed the history behind it, we've discussed the issues surrounding why people think otherwise, and we've discussed the very first steps to take on your own magical path.

This is the place where the stream of history empties into the ocean of the present, and in that ocean we have many opportunities to help us grow. There are books, websites, and organizations that can help us even further.

My first recommendation is, of course, my own book *The Magic of Catholicism: Real Magic for Devout Catholics*. This book describes the theology behind Christian magic in detail and gives succinct steps in building up one's own magical practice.

For those seeking a more community-oriented setting, there are groups out there. To my knowledge, none of these groups adheres to a standard of strict theological orthodoxy, and they are honest about this.

As to Christian magical orders, the only one I know of right now is the Order of the Astral Star, under the leadership of Frater Pneuma. I've known him for 17 years as of this writing, and can vouch for him as an Adept and as a person.

There are also various Martinist groups descending from Louis Claude St. Martin, whose spiritual system was founded squarely on Catholicism. Some modern Martinist groups keep to that, while many of them have discarded their Christian foundation entirely. Proceed with much caution.

Another option is found in the Theosophical churches, of which the Liberal Catholic Church is the best known. I have little experience with them, so cannot vouch for them other than knowing their history and that they're magic-friendly.

Those looking to go further out have the option of the Gnostic churches. The two with which I've had the most interaction are the Apostolic Johannite Church of the Third Age, led by Mar Thomas, and the Oriental Apostolic Church of Damcar led by Tau Mikael Basilides. While I'm not a member of either church, I've spoken at length with both of them and have only good things to say thus far.

And what about those whose interest is folk magic? For this, one would do well to look up the *Rue's Kitchen* website, whose webmistress is very knowledgeable and a wonderful person. One could also read Vito Quattrocchi's *Sicilian Benedicaria* or my own *Ways of the Holy Benedetta* for lessons in Italian and Sicilian folk practices. For the folk practices of German and German-American magicians, the authoritative text is *The Red Church* by Fr. Chris Bilardi.

As we can see, there are many, many resources out there, and thanks to the internet there is more available to us now than at any time in history.

The internet has brought all the greats texts of history to our fingertips with a few mouse clicks.

Social media has brought magical practitioners together in ways not thought possible even ten years ago, let alone when I started 26 years ago!

With the information age upon us, the vast ocean of the present is more navigable than ever. So go forth and swim, and grow in your quest for knowledge!